

St. Petersburg 'Doghunter' Websites Banned

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russian Internet censorship was broadened this week to include animal protection as two "doghunter" websites were banned in St. Petersburg.

Russia has a thriving underground community of vigilantes who kill off arguably dangerous stray dogs in areas where animal control measures are ineffective. An estimated 1 million strays roam the streets nationally and people have been wounded and even killed in attacks by hungry dogs.

The court ban was imposed at the request of city prosecutors, who said on their website that the sites violate Russian laws on information, the animal world and protection of minors.

The move may spell a change in Russia's approach to dog-hunters, none of whom have so far been found guilty of animal abuse. The country's animal rights legislation only criminalizes animal abuse committed out of hooliganism, for profit or in front of minors.

Doghunters claim to be doing the government's job in protecting the public. Some 16,600 people were attacked in Moscow alone by stray animals in 2008, the last year for which statistics are available, the Federal Consumer Protection Service said.

Russia also censors online "extremist" content, pirated films and websites deemed to promote suicide, illegal drugs and child pornography.

The list of topics subjected to online censorship is increasing, with promotion of unauthorized rallies added in late December.

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